

**V. VASILIEV'S "ALTERNATIVE HISTORY" AS A LABORATORY OF TOPOI AND
ARCHETYPES: BETWEEN THE TURBAN OF ISKANDER AND THE
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Abstract: The article examines the poetics of alternative history in two works by V. Vasiliev — *The Turban of Iskander (An Alternative History)* and *The Alexandrian Pass*. Based on episodes featuring Kornilov, Romanov-Iskander, and V. F. Yasnetsky-Voino, the analysis focuses on: (1) mechanisms of “reassembling” historical time (dream sequences, inserted constructions, retrospections, and prolepses); (2) the interaction of national and all-Russian topoi (Tashkent/Bukhara “the entire empire”); and (3) the archetypal symbolism of power and path (turban/crown, horse, “pass”) in the context of the dialogic model of Russian-language literature (N. L. Leiderman). It is shown that Vasiliev’s alternative narrative relies on a dense system of cultural codes and symbols that reinterpret the canon of “White” and “imperial” mythology, creating a unified atemporal act that merges history, myth, and sacred time.

Keywords: alternative history, archetype, topos, Russian-language literature, Vasiliev, Iskander, Kornilov, Yasnetsky-Voino.

Introduction

The turn toward models of alternative history in Russian-language prose of Central Asia has intensified scholarly interest in the mechanisms of constructing a “dialogic image of the world” (Leiderman) and in the interaction between national and imperial cultural layers [9]. In V. Vasiliev’s prose, the key compositional knots are the “stitches” of time and space, where the Uzbek–Turkestan topos (“turban,” “Iskander,” the Alexandrian Pass) enters into a dynamic dialogue with the imperial narratives of the Romanovs, the White Movement, and the destiny of Russia. The aim of this study is to demonstrate how, in a pair of texts — *The Turban of Iskander* (2013) and *The Alexandrian Pass* (2016) — alternative history functions as a laboratory for the renaming and rethinking of archetypes of power and path.

Theoretical and Methodological Foundations

This research is based on: the concept of the “dialogic image of the world” and the cultural crossroadness of Russian-language literature [9; 12; 14; 15]; the tools of mythocriticism (archetypes of power, path, sacrifice; the “mythologeme of Alexander” [10]); the poetics of the alternative history genre as a synthetic formation combining documentary precision with fantastical causality.

The method involves close reading of key episodes supported by intertextual and cultural-historical analysis.

Inserted Constructions, Dream, and the “Rewiring” of Causality: The author deliberately breaks linear chronology by introducing inserted narrative nodes — “Meanwhile in Sevastopol...” [4, p. 85] — and the dream of General Kornilov, where historically documented facts (exhumation, security measures) are transformed into visionary causation. The hero “sees from outside” the opening of the grave [4, pp. 87–88], which becomes the motive for his tactical decision — the diversion around Yekaterinodar [4, p. 88]. The dream thus functions not as ornamentation but as a causal catalyst — a “historical trigger.”

Renomination and the Symbolism of Power: The line “Send my regards to the Turkestani!” [4, p. 88] initiates the renaming of Romanov into the “Turkestani” — a strategy for constructing a new sovereign image, where the turban metonymically replaces the crown. In the finale of *The Turban of Iskander*, Romanov “lifted the crown-turban” and “solemnly placed it on his bald head” [4, p. 94], transforming the Muslim sign of dignity into a universal symbol of authority, analogous to the Russian Monomakh’s Cap. This symbolic hybrid indicates a shift of the imperial axis — from St. Petersburg to Tashkent.

“Unified” as a Formula of Atemporal Action: It should be emphasized that the lexeme “unified” serves as a pervasive marker of the poetics of both works. In particular, in the climax of *The Turban of Iskander*, we read: “in a single moment, by God’s will, all actions merged together” [4, p. 96]; at the same time, in *The Alexandrian Pass*, the coronation “merged into a single atemporal act” [3, p. 19]. Thus, the key word “unified” becomes not only a semantic but also a structural element of the narrative. On the one hand, it binds together different chronotopes and narrative planes, while on the other, it expresses the idea of divine compression of time. In other words, this “compression” abolishes the conventional linear gap between events, concentrating the narrative space in a liturgical “now.” Hence, Vasiliev constructs a special model of artistic temporality in which the past, present, and future coexist synchronically within sacred simultaneity. Consequently, alternative history in his interpretation does not replace factuality but rather transforms it into a sacral syntagma — a unified field of action that joins the earthly and the meta-historical dimensions.

The Female Image as a Theologeme of Hope. The Empress Nadezhda (her name transparently meaning “hope”) embodies a theologeme of salvation: the prayerful invocation “Russia must not be left without hope!” [4, p. 96] reinforces the idea of anamnesis — Russia’s redemption through maternal mercy (hospitals, orphanages) [3, p. 19]. This is not mere domestic femininity but a political theology of compassion within a military mythology.

The Figure of the Physician: Yasnetsky-Voino Between History and Myth: The presence of a “forty-year-old” head doctor at the Tashkent hospital [4, p. 81] and the prayer mentioning “Bishop Luka” [3, p. 19] introduce a deliberate temporal shift: the real-life monastic tonsure of 1923 [5, p. 133] is projected onto 1917. This anachronism is not an error but a device of “sacred logic”: the character functions as a saintly intervention ensuring miraculous causality within historical narrative.

Topoi and Routes: “Turkestan — Empire: Vasiliev dramatizes the opposition of capitals — St. Petersburg and Tashkent — relocating the axis of legitimacy to the southeastern periphery. The plan to “repeat Suvorov’s Alpine crossing” through the Tien Shan — the Alexandrian Pass — becomes a mythologeme of the path and initiation [3, p. 20]. The passage functions both as a

military maneuver and as an initiation rite of the new imperial dynasty: “Without personal heroism, authority cannot be earned” [3, p. 20].

Archetypes and Their National Actualization. Iskander/Alexander and the “Fiery Horse”: The name Iskander evokes the Eastern legend of Alexander the Great (Navoi’s Wall of Iskander), while the image of the horse — “a reddish beast flying like fire” — transforms the hero into a centaur, a fusion of man and martial power [3, p. 47]. Allusions to Bucephalus reinforce imperial charisma through a local archetype: Kornilov’s Akhal-Teke horse, which saved its master, becomes a Turkic–Turkeistani symbol of valor. Turban/Crown as a Hybrid of Power. The turban, appropriated by a Romanov, constructs an image of “Eastern legitimacy”: power is achieved not through negation but through integration of Islamic and Orthodox codes. The hybrid is confirmed through renominations and diplomatic recognitions (Greece, England) [3, p. 19], where East and West acknowledge the new configuration of sovereignty.

Medicine and Nonlinear Practices of Knowledge. The fragments mentioning the tabib (healer), resins, and fumigations with isryk [4, p. 83] introduce the coexistence of folk and rational medicine. In Vasiliev’s alternative history, this is not ethnographic color but a conceptual model of the union between reason and faith — a “miraculous causality” of history itself.

Discussion: Genre Synthesis and the Dialogue of Cultures. The pair of texts demonstrates a genre synthesis uniting historical novella, hagiographic legend, and alternative history into a single structure. In Leiderman’s terms, this is a dialogue between the national topos (Turkestan) and the imperial topos (Russia), mediated by archetypes of power, path, and sacrifice. The system of symbols (“unified,” turban/crown, horse, pass) constructs an atemporal action where personal and national destinies merge into a single salvific mission.

Conclusion.

Vasiliev’s alternative history is not a retrospective utopia but a mode of revealing the super-causality of history through archetypal symbolism and intercultural dialogue. Renomination (“Turkeistani”), hybridization of symbols of power (turban/crown), and the initiatory motif of the Alexandrian Pass construct a new center of sovereignty. The female image (Nadezhda) and the figure of the physician-saint (Yasnitsky-Voino) articulate a theology of mercy and miraculous aid as a political anthropology of salvation. Methodologically, the categories of “image of the world,” “dialogue of cultures,” “archetypal symbolism,” and “synthetic genre formations” are productive for analyzing Russian-language prose of Central Asia. Future research should focus on the role of animal epic and the equine archetype in shaping both imperial and national myths.

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